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# THE OSSIANIC SOCIETY,

FOUNDED on St. Patrick's Day, 1853, for the Preservation and Publication of Manuscripts in the Irish Language, illustrative of the Fenian period of Irish History, &c. with Literal Translations and Notes.

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“Eirtis a eisge ðanba,  
ne h-iomrað na h-ealaðna;  
Leanam map ba cleap d'áin ð-cearb,  
beanam an glar vo'n Ðaoiðeil.”

Sean Óán.

Attend, ye sages of Banba,  
To the history of our art ;  
Let us trace, as was our custom,  
And unlock the treasures of the Gaelic.

*Old Poem.*

IRISHMEN have been often reproached with having no history of their country, and so far as there is a foundation for such a reproach, the blame rests with the last few generations, and most surely not with our ancestors, who from a very early period paid more attention than almost any European people to the preservation of the records of all important events connected with their fatherland.

We certainly have no History of Ireland yet such as we could desire; but materials for such a work we have in great abundance, and the object of this Society is to rescue many of these, which remain scattered over the country in decaying manuscripts, from being lost, and to make them generally available to the English as well as to the Irish reader. A faithful historian will not be content to compile his history from records and annals only, which, while they generally possess the merit of being true and authentic, are also for the most part dry and uninteresting; but, fables and tales, and legends, whether in prose or verse, will also be invaluable to him as expressions of the mind, and evidences of the intellectual cultivation of those periods concerning which his *statistical* information is often very meagre.

The Irish Archaeological Society has, within the last few years issued its quota, in the shape of sixteen large quarto tomes: thus laying a solid foundation for the historian to build upon. The Society recently established for the preservation of the scattered

fragments of our sublime and beautiful melodies is also in active operation. The Kilkenny and South East of Ireland Archaeological Society, which started into existence in 1849 with but very few members, has now, in point of numerical strength, exceeded the most sanguine hopes of its founders; whilst the Ulster Journal of Archaeology progresses at a steady pace—all working in the one common cause, to preserve the memory of what our ancestors did, of what were their manners and general character; in fact, the state of Society in ancient Ireland.

The Ossianic Society has not been founded as a rival to any existing society. The number of those who take an interest in Irish literature is unfortunately too small to justify any proceedings which might tend to create disunion in their ranks. It has been formed rather as an auxiliary to the above-named existing associations; and for the express purpose of publishing and translating into the English language a most interesting class of manuscripts, comprising Fenian Poems; Tales, Romances, Legends, &c. illustrative of the period in which flourished Fionn, Oisin, Oscur, Goll, Caoilte, and Conan Maol. These documents unhappily remain almost forgotten by Irishmen up to this very day—if we may except the labors of a few enthusiastic individuals, whose zeal for the cause of fatherland and its literature urged them onwards in a course not likely to lead to fame or fortune. Among the earliest of such pioneers we have to mention the name of Mr. Charles Wilson, who, in 1782, published a small quarto volume of Ossianic Poetry, which from its extreme rarity is not procurable at any price; but a member of our council has been fortunate enough to secure a copy. In 1789, a kindred spirit came forth in the person of Miss Brooke, a name which every Irishman should be proud of, who published a large quarto volume of Ossianic Poetry, &c., which in the beginning of the present century became so exceedingly scarce that an enterprising Dublin printer, the late Mr. Christie of James's-street, thought it a profitable speculation in trade to venture on a new edition, which he published in 1816, in the shape of a stout octavo volume. Another edition of this work would now be desirable, and it is hoped that some person may be found patriotic enough to undertake its publication. In 1817, the late and profound Irish scholar, Mr. Edward O'Reilly, wrote an elaborate essay on Ossianic literature, which is printed in the twelfth volume of the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy; and the Rev. William Hamilton Drummond, D.D., whose name should be dear to every lover of Ossianic lore, wrote a very learned essay on the same subject, which is also printed in the same volume with O'Reilly's, both essays being written in refutation of Macpherson's theories, are highly deserving the attention of Irish scholars. In 1852,

the latter gentleman (Dr. Drummond), who, indeed, may be justly termed, "*Oisin a n-diaigh na Feinne*," published a volume of Ossianic Poetry, consisting of metrical translations into English from the original Irish, with an interesting critical dissertation on Fenian history, literature, and lore.

These few efforts excepted, nothing was done in Ireland for the preservation of Ossianic Literature, until the formation of this Society in 1853; and the Council now congratulate the members on the large accession which has been made to their ranks within so short a period: a fact which shows that Irishmen are not apathetic in the sustainment of a good cause, and that there is still ground for entertaining the hope of saving from the wreck of time, the songs, poems, and legends of Oisin, Erin's ancient bard and minstrel.

Under these circumstances the Council appeals for support to all Irishmen, whether at home or abroad, who love their country—to all who feel an interest in the literature of their native land—to their brethren the Gael of Scotland; as well as to all students of comparative philology throughout the world. For all these the publications of the Society must possess a deep interest; but on the exertions of its members depends the stability of the Society. There is no individual member, no matter how humble his station in life, who has not some influence on his fellow-man; and by using this influence each can enlist and enrol supporters to swell our ranks. Without such systematic efforts no society will flourish as it ought. And we may well hope for extended support, as our terms of membership are so very moderate that few can be prevented from joining our ranks on the score of expense, a subscription of five shillings per annum constituting membership; and even this small sum is not demanded until there is a book ready for delivery.

Neither editors nor officers receive the smallest amount of remuneration for their labours. They all work gratuitously for the good cause; and were not this the fact, little could be accomplished for an annual subscription of five shillings.

As it is well known that many rare and valuable manuscripts exist in the hands of private individuals, to whom they are as a sealed book, the Council of the Ossianic Society appeals earnestly to all such persons for permission to copy any manuscripts they may possess, and for any information concerning them, which will be thankfully received by the Honorary Secretary, Mr. JOHN O'DALY, 9, Anglesea-street, Dublin.